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General Debate 3 (a): Actions for the further implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development at the global, regional and national levels

3 (b): Sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration

Statement submitted by FEMM Foundation, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council[2]

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[1] E/CN.9/2018/1.
[2] The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

The FEMM Foundation is a knowledge-based health programme for women inspired by women's rights which informs members about their own health care and helps them make voluntary decisions based health care options, information, and understanding. The Foundation is dedicated to health education, medical research, and improving reproductive health care to advance women's health.

Sustainable cities require the realization of all aspects of development. Many cities have recognized the importance of health and centred health services in cities and addressed public health issues through agencies. Health is a right, as well as an enabler of participation in the social and economic life of one's community. Poor health can impact personal, social, and economic aspects of people's lives, leaving them isolated even in growing cities.

Women and girls comprise approximately half the population of the world, but remain more vulnerable to health problems due to biological and social reasons. Women also often accept as normal symptoms such as irregular bleeding, pain, depression, mood swings, and weight gain, not realizing that these are often signs of underlying hormonal imbalances and abnormalities. Even when women seek medical care, most health care providers and programmes struggle to diagnose them and often can only treat the symptoms.

These underlying conditions can affect women and girls' long-term overall health, sometimes irreversibly. They can also affect women and girls' ability to complete their education, engage in work, and plan their families, which in turn can interfere with women and girls' ability to participate in all areas of their lives. Women's poor health often affects their families and communities as well. Sustainable cities require healthcare services that address previously under-served reproductive health needs for women and girls.

FEMM meets the underlying needs of women in ways that empower them to participate in all aspects of community life. FEMM's focus on education allows women to be informed patients. Even women who have not completed schooling can learn to monitor their signs of health. Comprehensive health care for women can now be provided through basic health delivery systems, making this approach to women's health more effective, more accessible and affordable, providing stronger health outcomes for women. Understanding women's bodies will also combat stigma and myths associated with normal biological processes such as menstruation which can interfere with education and economic opportunities. This understanding will enable women and girls to follow dreams and opportunities; regardless of how far those dreams will take them.

FEMM teaches women to understand the importance of hormonal and overall health. Teaching women to understand and monitor the signs of their hormonal activity empowers them to make better and more informed health decisions in all areas of their lives. It allows them to identify abnormalities at an early stage to seek appropriate health care and treatment. It allows them to make informed choices about their health, relationships, and family planning. It also helps them to put health and family planning goals into action to achieve the desired results.

A woman who understands how her body works can monitor her health and seek help when needed. It is well known, that hormones are essential to reproductive and overall women's health. Ovulation is a sign of health in women. It is an indication of sufficient and appropriate hormone level in the nine essential hormones that influence women's health. FEMM assists women to understand this information and to recognize the benefits of hormonal balance. Women taught by FEMM will be able to

identify abnormalities, seek health treatment when needed, and will be able to understand that their symptoms or complaints should not be disregarded.

Signs of hormonal imbalance are common to many women. Symptoms range from acne, to weight gain, depression, migraines, pain, irregular bleeding, and conditions such as polycystic ovarian syndrome. Many women are told that these symptoms are not important or that they are imagining these symptoms. They are told that irregular cycles are "normal", and that the associated pain is part of the difficulty of being a woman. Yet, these symptoms can have a profound effect on women's ability to participate in the workforce. Moreover, a lack of understanding these symptoms can foster negative attitudes towards women as employees and entrepreneurs.

We now have the science to understand that these symptoms are not normal or healthy, and the ability to diagnose and treat the underlying cause of these symptoms and conditions. This is empowering for women. By taking control of their health, they will have greater freedom in their decisions about working life.

FEMM also enables women to make informed choices about family planning. There is a right to adequate family planning and information about reproductive and sexual health that is accurate and respects cultural, religious, and ethical beliefs. Some programmes fail to ensure that women have the education needed to understand their bodies and to fully understand the family planning methods they are using, and some of these programmes may not always respect women's values.

Information-based health education and medical care are uniquely suited to meet these needs while respecting individual choices and values. FEMM offers reproductive and hormonal education and helps women to understand the way various family planning methods work and their potential side effects. It educates women about the science of their bodies, how to identify their "fertile window", and how to achieve or avoid pregnancy. Knowledge-based programmes also have the benefit of being transportable: anywhere a woman goes, she can apply her knowledge to understand her health.

FEMM has developed an "app" to help women take control of their health. The FEMM app is available free of charge in English and Spanish for both Apple and Android devices. Women who use the FEMM app can track their observations and symptoms to better understand their bodies and health. Just as each woman is different, so are her observations and experiences, which is why the app is completely customizable. Women can track as much or as little as they like, and add symptoms and observations. It also provides insights into what a woman is experiencing in her cycle, and can flag potential health concerns and connect women with medical professionals for treatment.

FEMM's researchers have rethought women's health. They have found that a woman's hormonal health is intrinsically linked with her overall health. They have developed better diagnostic criteria to identify conditions that are currently treated mainly at the symptomatic level and treat them at the roots. They are even discovering links with conditions not typically considered related to reproductive health. FEMM is rethinking the health of contemporary women in ways that will help them to take charge of their health and thrive in their communities.

FEMM's Medical Management programme trains doctors to diagnose and treat reproductive health problems, with a holistic view of a woman's body that incorporates recent research on the complex hormonal interactions between different body systems. This interaction, and the delicacy of the hormonal activity in a woman's body, is essential to the experience of health in the entire female body. FEMM has developed innovative protocols that allow doctors to identify underlying

problems with precision and treat them effectively. This medical support provides treatments that help women to live healthy lives.

Women's full participation in society requires the investment in women's health and health education. Women's healthcare has often failed to meet women's needs. Informed decisions lead to healthier decisions, and women play a key role in family and community health outcomes. Through FEMM's innovative programmes, women will be empowered to take charge of their health, and healthcare systems will be able to meet their needs.

FEMM's programmes are ready to be incorporated into existing health systems and address the often-under-addressed health needs of women. The knowledge gained through FEMM can allow women to identify underlying health concerns and to achieve or avoid pregnancy. When people attain the highest level of health they can, they are able to thrive and partake in their communities, lowering poverty and helping make their cities sustainable. FEMM is prepared to assist the Commission and Member States to meet this goal.